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PAGE 02 ROME 00066 041810Z  
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SUBJECT: UNIFIL MANDATE RENEWAL NOTICE: ITALIAN VIEWS

REF: 01 STATE 216231

CLASSIFIED BY: DCM WILLIAM P. POPE

1. (C) SUMMARY. THE GOI WILL VIEW WITH GREAT INTEREST, AND SOME CONCERN, PRECISE PLANS FOR RESTRUCTURING/DOWNSIZING OF UNIFIL. THIS STEMS IN LARGE PART FROM TODAY'S HEIGHTENED TENSIONS IN THE REGION, BUT IS ALSO LINKED TO ITALY'S GENERAL PREFERENCE FOR EMPLOYING MULTILATERAL PEACEKEEPING FORCES. ABOVE ALL, THE GOI WISHES TO BE A PLAYER IN THE REGION WHILE MAINTAINING A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE USG. EARLY AND CLOSE CONSULTATION WITH ITALY WILL BE THE KEY FACTOR IN SECURING SUPPORT FOR US VIEWS ON UNIFIL. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) REFTEL SEEKS POST'S OPINION OF LIKELY ITALIAN VIEWS ON UNIFIL DOWNSIZING. WHILE ITALY IS AWARE OF UNIFIL'S SHORTCOMINGS -- AND WILL THEREFORE LIKELY BACK CONTINUED RESTRUCTURING -- IT WOULD PROBABLY VIEW WITH CONCERN ANY CHANGES THAT MIGHT/LEAD TO GREATER INSTABILITY. ACCORDINGLY, THE PRECISE NATURE OF THE RESTRUCTURING WILL BE KEY, AS WILL ADDRESSING ITS LIKELY IMPACT ON THE SITUATION ON  
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PAGE 03 ROME 00066 041810Z  
THE GROUND.

3. (C) EVEN IF PRESENT TENSIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST WERE TO EASE, HOWEVER, ITALY'S GENERALLY FAVORABLE ATTITUDE TOWARD MULTILATERAL PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS WOULD BE A FACTOR. SO WOULD THE GOI'S DESIRE TO EXERT INFLUENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND PM BERLUSCONI'S COMMITMENT TO MAINTAINING WHAT HE VIEWS AS A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH WASHINGTON.

4. (C) IN SUM, SECURING AND MAINTAINING ITALIAN SUPPORT FOR US VIEWS ON UNIFIL WILL TURN IN LARGE PART ON EARLY AND FREQUENT CONSULTATIONS AT SENIOR LEVELS. SHOULD THESE FAIL TO BEAR FRUIT, INTERVENTIONS AT THE POLITICAL LEVEL MAY BE NECESSARY.  
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